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March 13, 2011

Testimony in support of:

**H.B. 5363: AN ACT TRANSFERRING THE CONSERVATION FUNCTIONS OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE**

Submitted By: Joan Nichols, Government Relations Specialist, Connecticut Farm Bureau
Association

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization of over 5,000 families dedicated to farmers and the future of Connecticut agriculture.

Senator Edward Meyer, Representative Richard Roy and members of the Environment Committee:

We support transferring the conservation functions of the Department of Environmental Protection to the Department of Agriculture. A Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources would provide a comprehensive program of land based management and acquisition leaving the Department of Environmental Protection to more effectively manage and focus on the issues related to environmental quality.

The Department of Agriculture has a proven track record of working effectively with agricultural producers in all commodity groups. Forestry, which is part of agriculture as defined under CGS 1-1q, would be more effectively served by an agency that understands the needs of producers and the intricacies of a land based business enterprise. Many farms own and manage forest land and this resource base is an important component of their agricultural operation. Likewise, there is land under the jurisdiction of the CT DEP which has an agricultural component to its land management program. This agricultural component often needs to be balanced with wildlife management objectives. All of these land based considerations would be best served under a Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Timber producers have been facing an unnecessarily adversarial regulatory culture within the upper layers of DEP, that translates into reduced economic activity, and fewer jobs in the timber industry than there would be if forestry practitioners and land owners weren't treated like enemies of the state. Rather than tackling the job of changing the culture of DEP, we encourage you move their agricultural related conservation functions to an agency, the Department of Agriculture, that has a proven track record of meeting it's regulatory responsibilities, in a professional manner that encourages, rather than discourages the agricultural producers that it regulates. This proposed transfer would compliment the DEEP merger, already proposed by the Governor.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.